

Welcome to wonderland



When we first heard about Al Arish Restaurant we weren't quite sure what to expect. Described as a cross between a welcoming Bedouin tent of yesteryear and the golden glitz of Emirates Palace, we couldn't quite wrap our head around what exactly we'd experience. Excited and undoubtedly curious, we popped over to check it out.

Opened in 1993 and inaugurated by Sheikh Zayed himself, the Al Dafra Tourist Village is every bit the sight to see. The village features boat tours that depart daily, a banqueting hall for private events and of course, our target – the main restaurant on offer, Al Arish.

When we arrive we can't help but notice the large, castle-like facade beckoning us in. Imposing, grand and all together fabulous we leave the steamy weather behind as we enter the dim and cool interior. As our eyes adjust we take in a variety of things all at once – ornately carved silver chandeliers dripping with ruby crystals hang from traditional palm thatched roofs and walls,

striped marble pillars separate an area where fresh fish is displayed and separated with a rather large amount of wooden curlicues and potted plants.

Not one to shy away from grand statements, after a quick tour of the place we discover an old racing dhow sat in the middle of the buffet area! Decorated with fishing nets, this boat provides an enormous array of appetisers for the choosing. The rest of the buffet offers traditional Arabic and international cuisine that we can't help but sample. We're ushered to what else but a live aquarium table fitted with a glass top to indulge.

Nautical décor, goldfish viewing tabletops, thatched palm walls, silver chandeliers and delicious food – all things you wouldn't think work but somehow fantastically combine for an over the top, amazing experience. If you still haven't been to Al Arish then you haven't experienced Abu Dhabi at its finest – a mix of old, new and the downright delightful this place really does have it all.

Sawaiba Khan

Where? Al Arish Restaurant, next to the fish market

When? 12pm to 4pm and 7pm to 11pm

Cost: AED 175 for the buffet

Contact: 02 673 2266

We say: Try the date cappuccino - yum!